Dense fog throws life out of gear in twin cities

By Our Staff Reporter

RAWALPINDI: Thick fog gripped the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad on Tuesday, disrupting several domestic and international flights, train services and road transport.

"The general visibility was 50 meters in twin cities from 5am to 9am.

The fog started in the twin cities in the wee hours of Tuesday. At 12 midnight, the fog was recorded at 700 meters in Islamabad International Airport, while it reduced to 100 meters by 4am, and the visibility was 50 meters from 5am to 9am," said the met official.

"Fog will again grip the twin cities on Wednesday morning also," he said and added that the minimum temperature was recorded at one degree Celsius in Rawalpindi and Islamabad on Tuesday. There was chaos at the airport, Railway Station and on the roads in Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

The city traffic moved at a snail's pace on the roads as the visibility did not improve till 10am. The school children and office goers faced difficulties while going to their destinations.

"It was difficult to drive on the road while going to drop my children off at school at Bahria Town Phase-7 early in the morning. I was not able to see 20 meters ahead due to thick white fog at Soan bridge between DHA and Bahria Town," said Faisal Sheikh, a resident of Defence Housing Authority (DHA) Phase-I.

Muhammad Faraz, a resident of Chaklala Scheme-III, said that the traffic was moving at a snail's pace on the road near Ayub Park as everyone was driving very slowly with caution.

The airport officials said that the runway visibility was too low in the early hours and would disrupt the flight schedule.

"The fog all around Punjab has badly affected trains. Around 10 trains have been late by four to five hours or more," said an official of Pakistan Railway at Rawalpindi Railway Station.

The worst affected trains are: Awami Express, Pakistan Express, Karachi Express, Taizgam and night coaches.

The spokesman of the motorway police said that the motorways I, II and III were opened in the afternoon.

He stated that the Motorway police deputed a special squad at some spots for the safety of commuters.

He stated that the police were getting phone numbers of the motorway users in order to provide them latest information about weather conditions during their journey on the motorway.

VEHICLES travel on Islamabad Expressway as fog engulfed the federal capital on Tuesday morning. — Photo by Mohammad Asim

140 sewing machines distributed

By Our Correspondent

TAXILA: The Attock district administration on Tuesday distributed 140 sewing machines among deserving women, empowering them to support their families.

A ceremony in this regard was organised at the District Council Hall, in collaboration with a local NGO where Deputy Commissioner Attock Rao Atif Raz was the chief guest. As many as 55 sewing machines were provided to the Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (Tevta) to assist trained women in starting work immediately. Sharing her feelings, one beneficiary, Shazia Bibi, a mother of three, said the sewing machine had changed her outlook towards life.

"This support has given me hope. Now I can stitch clothes at home and help my husband meet household expenses with dignity," she said.

"The collaboration between the district administration, welfare organisation, and Tevta reflects a shared commitment to turning vocational training into real employment opportunities for women," said Deputy Director Social Welfare Haseeb Khalid while addressing on this occasion.

"Providing trained women with essential equipment bridges the gap between learning and earning, ensuring that technical education translates into meaningful income," said District Director Tevta Syed Zawar Hussain Shah.

Unjustified hike in private schools' fee irks National Assembly committee

Body cites absence of quality education, improvements in facilities; directs that employees working in govt or NGO-run schools must get full minimum wage

By Kashif Abbasi

ISLAMABAD: National Assembly Standing Committee on Federal Education and Professional Training on Tuesday criticised the Private Educational Institutions Regulatory Authority (Peira) over the alleged unjustified increase in school fees and raised serious concerns about the fee appraisal mechanism linked to quality assessment.

The committee, which met with Dr Shazia Sobia Aslam Soomro in the chair at the Conference Room of the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE), emphasised the need for stricter scrutiny, greater transparency, and effective oversight by Peira to ensure that quality-based appraisals are fair, credible, and serve the interests of students and parents rather than enabling arbitrary fee hikes.

The committee pointed out that the quality assessment framework of private educational institutions was based on seven core indicators, including quality of teaching, classroom learning environment, infrastructure and facilities, transparency and public disclosure, administrative and operational capacity, cleanliness and discipline, and safety and security. Members stressed that any fee increase must be directly linked to genuine improvements in these areas and should not place undue financial burden on parents.

The body was informed that the Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) signed with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been vetted by the law ministry and include provisions for compliance with the notified minimum wage.

Committee members emphasised that all employees working in government schools funded or operated through NGOs must be paid salaries strictly in accordance with the minimum wage laws, without any exception.

The committee recommended that all buildings presently under the administrative control of the Directorate General of Special Education (DGSE) be formally handed over to DGSE to ensure their effective utilisation exclusively for the education, rehabilitation, and welfare of children with special needs.

The committee emphasised that these facilities must be used solely for their intended purpose. The panel further stressed that the transfer of control would enable DGSE to improve service delivery, enhance institutional capacity, and provide a more conducive learning environment for children with special needs.

Further, a reminder was given in December 2025 to Baitul Mal to vacate the DGSE building. The committee was informed that, in collaboration with NAVTTC, children with special needs are provided skill training to empower them with skills and connect them with income generation.

Meanwhile, the committee was briefed that, in pursuance of Pakistan's obligations under various Articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training has undertaken a range of initiatives aimed at ensuring the protection, development, and well-being of children.

These measures include the provision of free education and transport facilities, implementation of school-based free meal programmes, and strengthening of national immunisation, vaccination, and de-worming programmes to safeguard children's health. In addition, focused interventions have been introduced to promote the mental health and emotional well-being of children within the education system.

The meeting was attended by MNAs including Anjum Aqeel Khan, Syeda Amnah Batool, Zeb Jaffar, Farah Naz Akbar (Parliamentary Secretary), Dr Shazia Sobia Aslam Soomro, Mussarat Rafique Mahesar and Abdul Aleem Khan and concerned government officials.

Experts identify gaps in national cyber security efforts

By Kalbe Ali

ISLAMABAD: Experts have identified gaps in the national cyber security efforts and pointed out that insufficient cybersecurity expertise, lack of public awareness about online safety as well as inadequate training for both citizens and professionals were the root causes for these gaps.

Speaking at a roundtable organised by Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) on 'Cyber Security of Pakistan', they said in an age of cyber-connectivity, cybersecurity has emerged as the most important component of national digital sovereignty.

The speakers said the recent government efforts towards establishment of a comprehensive cybersecurity regime at national level included a new policy and Cybersecurity Act and a proposed Cybersecurity Authority.

There was a consensus that the state should have rules and regulations that are enforceable. "If you're going to ban something, you should be able to enforce it. So, I don't think PTA has the capability or any telecommunication authority in the world has the capability to block the internet as a whole."

Brig Mukarram, DG Cyber-Intelligence PTA, said internet governance was a key ingredient to the cyber security at the national level because if one sees cyber threat space has enlarged it is because of social media and AI.

"So, if there is no VPN we can turn Pakistan into the Stone Age. What is desired is actual regulation, which is already in the case of mainstream channels, cameras and in the case of social media. There is social media authority. That is coming. So, your burden would be taken off," he observed.

Acting President of the IPRI Brig Dr Rasshid Wali Janjua said the new cybersecurity architecture would address cyber governance, education and awareness to create the desired cyber resilience at the national level.

Siddique Humayun, Director Advocacy IPRI, remarked that the ongoing discussion in cybersecurity on governance and forensics suggests that institutional capacity and technical standards remain uneven.

"The central challenge for Pakistan lies in ensuring that the architecture, skills, enforcement and forensic credibility, matches the ambition and strength of the legislation itself.

"The governance gap lies in this divergence between our de jure legal postures and our de facto operational realities," he added.

The participants included cyber security experts, government officials from relevant ministries, private sector and regulatory bodies.

They stated that cyber security was a shared responsibility and all stakeholders have to play a role in making it reliable, secure and invincible. The speakers also stressed the need for investment in capacity building and technology development.

They added that implementation and control were essential for ensuring cyber security and Pakistan has to study models of other countries such as Singapore, the US and China, and overcome gaps in an indigenous manner by building its own safeguards, and regulations.

Senate delegation to visit US

ISLAMABAD: In an effort to establish parliamentary relation with the US Senate Deputy Chairman Syedal Khan Nasar will leada high-level Senate delegation to Washington from January 20 to 25.

The visit marks a historic milestone in Pakistan–US parliamentary relations and signifies the beginning of a new institutional chapter in transatlantic engagement.

Organised under the auspices of the Pakistan Policy Institute, the visit will, for the first time, formally include the United States–Pakistan Inter-Parliamentary Group (IPG).

This development represents a major achievement of strategic and non-traditional parliamentary diplomacy and reflects a shared commitment to strengthening democratic institutions through direct engagement between legislatures.

The initiative comes at a critical juncture of global and regional transformation, particularly in South Asia and the Middle East, where parliamentary institutions are increasingly recognized as vital actors in promoting dialogue, stability, and democratic governance.

The visit is being undertaken with clearly defined strategic objectives, including the establishment of a permanent institutional mechanism for sustained inter-parliamentary dialogue between the US Congress and the Senate of Pakistan. The delegation aims to promote democratic values, exchange best legislative practices, enhance parliamentary oversight, and strengthen institutional cooperation beyond traditional executive-level diplomacy. The visit will also focus on engaging with the Pakistani-American community to present Pakistan's parliamentary perspective on regional and global issues, while advancing scientific, cultural, and policy-oriented cooperation.

This visit is of historic significance, as in the 77-year history of Pakistan–US relations, no previous Pakistani parliamentary delegation has held formal engagements inside the Rayburn House Office Building under the auspices of the US Congress. The program will also include a press conference and media engagements at the National Press Club, Washington, D.C., as well as community and policy receptions in New Jersey.

The visit will lay the foundation for regular parliamentary exchanges, enhanced legislative cooperation, and a sustainable institutional partnership between Pakistan and the United States—anchored in mutual respect, democratic principles, and long-term strategic engagement. — Staff Reporter

Minister seeks report on massive tree cutting in Shakarparian

CDA says removed trees were paper mulberry and 30,000 trees will be planted in their place

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Tuesday took notice of the massive tree cutting in the scenic Shakaparian area, H-8 and along the Park Road.

Sources said the minster while reacting to media reports showed displeasure with the CDA and sought a complete report on the issue.

The sources said officials of the CDA environment wing on Tuesday evening remained busy in compiling a report for the minister.

It is relevant to note that massive trees were cut down in Shakarparian, which CDA says were paper mulberry.

There were four patches of over 15 acres, where almost all trees were removed - turning the area into "bald and barren". Citizens said it was hard to believe that there were 100pc paper mulberry trees in the area.

Social media users alleged that besides paper mulberry, indigenous trees were also chopped down that was why the area was giving the look of a barren land.

The large scale tree cutting is now giving a new look to Shakarparian area along the road, which used to be known as a cool road (thandi sarak) by locals, because of the thick web of trees at its length. Now, the visibility of the area is so open that even the Expressway is visible from the area.

However, CDA sticks to its stance that only paper mulberry trees were removed from the area, adding a contract was awarded to a private contractor, who removed paper mulberry trees. The CDA stated that 30,000 new trees will be planted in Shakarparian.

However, locals have been alleging that besides paper mulberry other trees were also cut down. Therefore, many believe that this issue warrants a proper inquiry.

Besides Shakarparian, grown trees were also cut down from the greenbelt of H-8 along the Expressway during construction activities for developing a park.

In recent days, many grown trees were also cut down near Park Road for the construction of a highway for linking Margalla Enclave Housing Scheme, a joint venture of CDA and DHA - from Park Road.

The road project was started without holding public hearing and getting Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) from Environment Protection Agency. At least four officials of CDA confirmed to Dawn that the interior minister had sought a report on this issue as well.

Meanwhile, the issue of tree cutting and climate change in Islamabad remained a hot topic on social media on Tuesday. Senior journalist Umar Cheema in a post on X stated: "It's not too old when we used to say with pride that there is no smog in Islamabad. Now, as the population keeps increasing, the massacre of trees is taking place. The cutting on the Margalla Hills continues and Islamabad is also turning into something like Lahore and Karachi," he said.

Similarly, senior anchorperson Syed Talat Hussain stated: "This is an unspeakable disaster. While mulberry trees were a problem for some, the dust, heat and environmental pollution will engulf everyone living or passing through this once green and beautiful city. Ruinous policies. Terrible planning."

Veteran journalist Nusrat Javed said: "Deeply regretting the decision of settling in Islamabad. I had wrongly imagined this city to stay ever green with less population, traffic and crime. Failed to foresee it turning into a jungle of concrete."

Meanwhile, CDA on its X account stated: "According to Normlized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) analysis of Islamabad, a comparative assessment between January 2023 and December 2025 shows a net increase of more than 9,000 acre in green cover. The data indicates that significant green areas have been added in the Margalla Hills, while a reduction in green cover is observed in certain sectoral areas where planned urban development has taken place."

Similarly, CDA on its social media page also came up with a strange explanation, stating that those who want to stop operation against illegal encroachment [operation against slums in Bari Imam] are doing propaganda in the name of tree cutting. However, the statement did not say anything about tree cutting in H-8 and Park Road and Shakarparian.